

Bush Brushes Off Criticism of Sanction Decision

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President Bush yesterday brushed aside criticism of his decisions not to impose sanctions on the Soviet Union for its crackdown on Lithuania, but administration officials acknowledged that they expect the political breathing room granted them by Congress will not last more than a week or two.

Senate Majority Leader George J. Mitchell (D-Maine) said the White House should take action aimed at encouraging negotiations between the Soviets and Lithuanians, but he was generally supportive of Bush.

Conservative Republicans, however, began stepping up rhetoric, with Sens. Alfonse M. D'Amato (N.Y.) and Gordon J. Humphrey (N.H.) leading the way. Some House members, meanwhile, made public phone conversations with Lithuanian President Vytautas Landsbergis in which he repeated his charge that the United States was selling out his nation.

Bush, asked in a picture-taking session whether he wanted to defend his decision to put aside consideration of sanctions against Moscow following its economic boycott of Lithuania, said, "I don't need any defense. The policies, decisions that I've taken have had strong support from the American people, and that's who I work for."

In testimony before Congress, Secretary of State James A. Baker III said Bush "has not made an irrevocable determination that under any and all circumstances he would not take specific actions." Baker said that Bush thinks "an appropriate response" to the situation now is to encourage dialogue.

Baker said it is difficult for the administration to determine "how hard to press or . . . the degree to which we should refrain from taking specific action." He said he and Bush believe that "we must follow a balanced and measured approach to Lithuania and to maintain perspective . . . on the numerous interests that we have at stake here, inter-

ests that are important" to the United States.

Among the interests Baker cited were relaxation of the Soviet grip on Eastern Europe and significant reductions in Soviet conventional and nuclear arms as part of arms-control pacts under negotiation.

While Baker got a generally favorable reception, criticism from the conservative senators began in earnest. "The struggle for freedom in Lithuania deserves our whole-hearted support even if we have to tell the Soviets there'll be no summit," said D'Amato, who added that he was "deeply concerned about the lack of action" by the Bush administration on Lithuania's behalf.

Humphrey said the time for patience has run out and predicted that more senators will be taking the floor to protest what he called the administration's "unprincipled policy" toward Lithuania.

"We've been patient on China, but nothing has happened. We've been patient on Lithuania, and nothing has happened. The time for si-

lence is past," Humphrey said. Administration officials acknowledged yesterday they had been warned by Democrats and Republicans that the generally supportive reaction in Congress would be short-lived if the situation in Lithuania does not change or worsens in the next to 10 days.

Landsbergis, in a phone call monitored by reporters, said yesterday, "It appears that the West doesn't want to help Lithuania."

"Our reaction is one of discouragement and disappointment," Lansbergis said. "It feels as if our worst fears are being realized." He accused the administration of being "misled by the Soviet Union" and said Moscow is "strangling [our] nation like a boa constrictor."

White House press secretary Marlin Fitzwater said Landsbergis "is fully aware of the president's concern and interest in freedom in his country" and reiterated Bush's call for dialogue between the Lithuanians and Soviets that will end in self-determination for Lithuania.